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ABSTRACT

A model designed to ease the transition for handicapped students from Head Start programs to public school settings is described. The model could also be adapted for transition from any private preschool to the public school setting for special needs children. The need for increased understanding between public school and Head Start program personnel regarding programing, eligibility, criteria, guidelines, mandates, and documentation needs is emphasized. To meet this need, a self-assessment instrument was developed. Data from the self-assessment illustrates responsibilities to each agency and promotes cooperation. Strategies to facilitate linking with the public schools are outlined and information that should be available to the schools is listed, including information from summaries of former Headstart Children. (A model time line reflecting the school calendar year, the self-assessment instrument, and a diagram showing agency inter-relationships are included.) (CL)

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Facilitating Linkage between Headstart and Public School Special Education Programs

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"FACILITATING LINKAGE BETWEEN HEADSTART AND PUBLIC SCHOOL SPECIAL EDUCATION PROGRAMS"

This model establishes the responsibility of the Headstart Program to use their required evaluations to develop future needs for the child to be placed in special education in public schools. Facilitating Linkage Between Headstart and Public School Special Education Programs utilizes the time constraints of the common calendar. To accomplish the transition objectives (mentioned in the following background sections) the authors developed a model timeline as exemplified in Figure I.

The status of Indiana's mandate allows public school programs to serve age ranges 5-18 (permissive is the 3 to 5 year category). In order to receive federal funds, students must be categorized by exceptionality. Headstart uses "developmentally delayed" as a generic category. This change in terminology had caused some misunderstanding between the agencies.

Public school's childfind responsibility needs to be better understood by non-public school personnel. Their responsibility is to identify, locate and evaluate or refer for evaluation. Public school personnel need to improve communication with Headstart personnel to facilitate this transition. These agencies both expressed a need for linkage in transition from Headstart to public schools. Personnel for both agencies were eager to work together.

Given this setting we decided to move on to developing strategies. This led to the development of a "model" for making the transition from Headstart; which could also be adapted for transition from any private preschool to the public school setting for special needs children. It should be emphasized that this is cur-

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rently a model; also how it is implemented in actuality differs from program to program.

In Indiana many preschoolers with special needs are served in Headstart programs, Associations for Retarded Citizens, private settings and United Way Agencies. Public schools that do serve preschoolers must categorize these youngsters with regard to a specific handicapping condition.

A basic understanding needs to be developed first. Public school personnel must recognize that Headstart is important to education, especially special education; that awareness is a very real and needed component of special education. Headstart personnel need to know and understand public school goals and responsibilities and both must work together to make programs better. Each must become familiar with similarities of programming, eligibility, criteria, etc. and each must be aware of and know the differences in guidelines and mandates.

Many times public schools do not understand the regulations of Headstart programs. We recommend that it be Headstart personnel's responsibility to provide this needed clarification. The good of the child and the family is always the central focus.

A real need was felt for Headstart personnel to be aware of the information necessary to be available to the public school, a need for documentation of special needs and the background of each child's previous educational experiences.

In order to better understand each other's programming and to know where a program really stood, a self-assessment was developed. This could be answered by either Headstart or public school staff. Although originally formulated for Headstart, it has wider usage with identifiers removed.

With the support and encouragement of the Resource Access Project Coordinator at the University of Illinois and Indiana's State Handicapped Coordinator, this program was given an opportunity for additional exposure and a great deal of positive feedback was received. It was felt to be imperative that the Headstart special needs child not be lost in placement transition, therefore avoiding the need to reestablish programming. Building on experiences in other states such as Florida and brainstorming, we presented the model at a Headstart conference in Southern Indiana in the Fall of 1981. Subsequently, we touched base with the Resource Access Project, developed a model and became increasingly hopeful that this could be put into place. The United States Commission of Administration, Children, Youth and Families further strengthened our hope by indicating that one of the emphasis of that office would be on Headstart in the future.

These materials were developed from actual experiences that gave Headstart personnel a guide with which to pursue activities in following the placement of handicapped children. The importance of this data, collected over the period of time, (which Figure 1 structures), provides requirements for placement of handicapped children in puolic school programs with P.L. 94-142 as the basic placement cri-

terian, with the understanding that public school, in some instances, might have to do additional unique evaluations.

The outline developed in Figure #2 is to be used in a workshop session with Headstart administrators and staff. The purpose of Figure 2 is to assess the status of the Headstart and public school relationship. Once this data is compiled and evaluated by Headstart personnel, obvious needs will be obtained, which become the basis for establishing the linkage process as Figure #1 would indicate.

Figure #3 was developed to provide clarification to both agencies in terms of the inter-related cooperation. More specifically, how does the concept of referred/identification impact on both agencies and how each agency can cooperate with the other to maximize the greatess success. This handout was used with workshop participants to illustrate how both agencies must cooperate during referral, evaluation and where responsibilities of the agencies interrelate.

A strategy the authors suggest for facilitating a positive linkage would be to video tape a model case conference with public school personnel. This could in turn be used as a workshop basically to train Headstart parents to prepare and anticipate their involvement.

Evaluation and Summary

Figure #4 gives both agencies the opportunity to gain answers to questions arrived at through the self assessment. It is designed to identify specific areas which each agency needs to improve. A

critical variable determined by the authors is to have an identified support person from both agencies who will take responsibility for using data collected, evaluation of progress, student follow-up and is committed to improve the overall linkage process.

This model was successfully implemented in several rural/small city school districts. Public school and Headstart programs who implemented these strategies responded most positively in regard to a better inter-relationship between their agencies. Parents were especially pleased with a sense of follow-through for their children.

The authors determined from field experiences that the actual desire to help these special children by correct placement was the impetus for continuing to follow this model. Successful programming and easy transition from Headstart to public school, and positive attitudes were overwhelmingly experienced by parents and professionals. Succeeding in maintaining the appropriate, continuous placement of handicapped children was the final evaluation of this project.

MODEL TIME LINE

		Screening potential special needs students-contacting parents and public school-referral for evaluation.	August/ September
Child in public school placement.	Following Year	Evaluation/assessment-full evaluation, including psychological, physical, educational, language.	October
Contact public school and parents re: child's progress.		Headstart Program adaptation written and in place.	November
Continue contact with public school and parents re: child's progress.		Monitor adaptive program and modify as appropriate.	December
		Continue monitoring as per Dec. Initial contact with public school regarding case conference for public school eligible students.	January
		Parents contacted and date, etc. for case conference finalized.	February
		Finalize Headstart data for case conference and parent preparation for meeting.	March
Update evaluation/assessment		Placement finalized-visit public school with child and parents.	April
		Placement finalized. Visit public school with child and parents	May

Figure #1

Figure #2

SELF ASSESSMENT

1. Do you have a contact person from the public school planning district or the Headstart Program?

2. Who is it? (Title, not name)

3. How often is contact with this individual made?

4. Who initiates the contact - Headstart or public school?

5. Do you have a consultation/referral process?

6. What is the referral process? (for P.S. what is it for preschool programs?)

7. Who is involved in this process?

8. What are your screening procedures?

9. Do you have in place a process for referral/evaluation/case conference? If so, explain.

10. What are your follow-up procedures?

11. How do you assess handicapping conditions?

12. What are placement procedures within the setting for identified handicapped children for preschool?

13. What provisions are made for referral of children with handicapping conditions that cannot be served within your setting?

14. How is the program adapted to meet the needs of the handicapped children who are served?

15. How is inservice provided for staff to serve the handicapped children?

16. How are the results of this intervention conveyed to the receiving Headstart and/or public school?

17. How does Headstart follow-up after the child (Handicapped/non-handicapped) leaves Headstart and how does PS use Headstart information regarding each individual child's educational experience?

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Figure #3

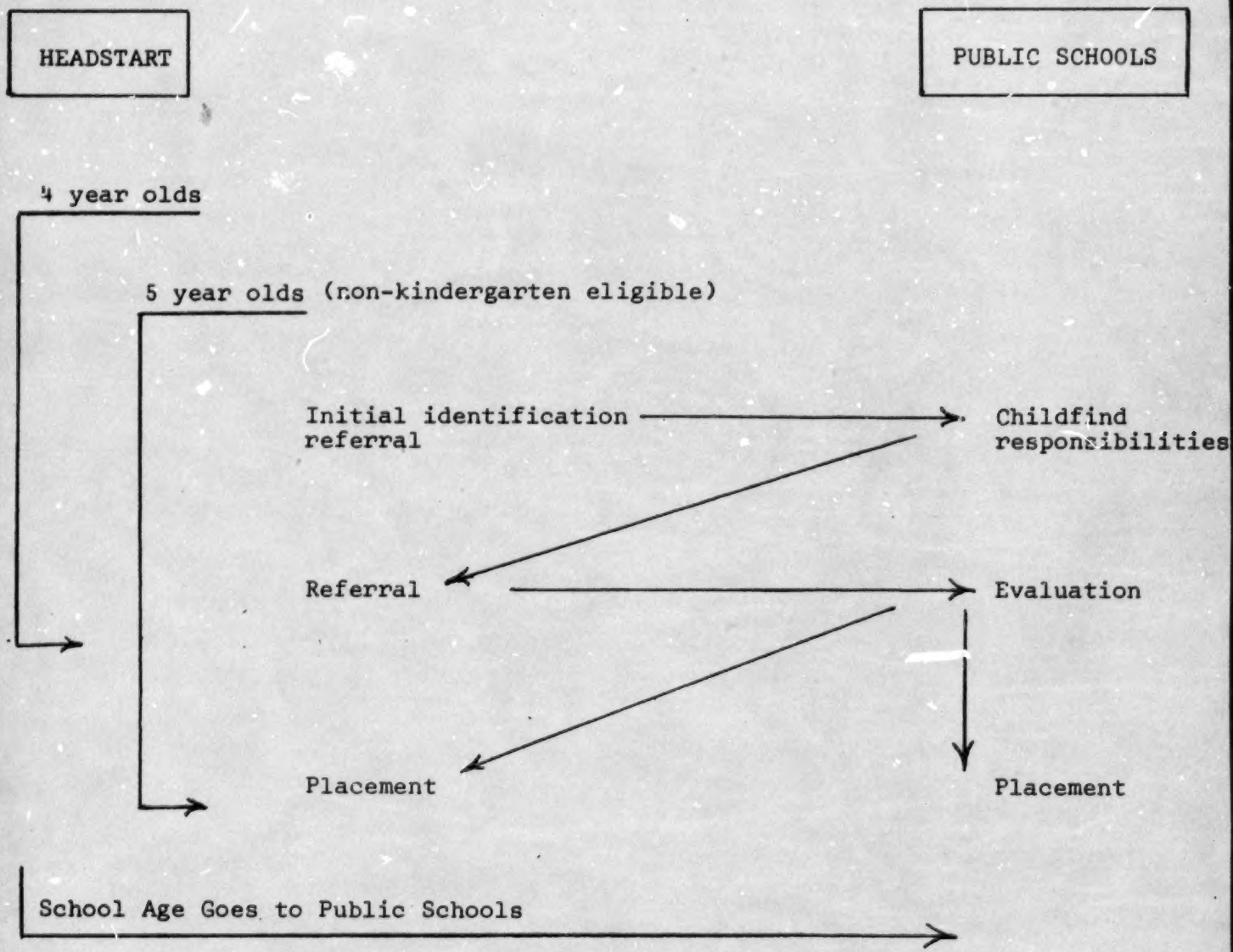
HEADSTART
PUBLIC SCHOOLS
4 year olds
5 year olds (non-kindergarten eligible)
Initial identification referral
Childfind responsibilities
Referral
Evaluation
Placement
Placement
School Age Goes to Public Schools

Figure 4

Assessment Strategies for Future Planning

I. Strategies that could facilitate linking with the public schools:

A. Establish a contact; if public school does not contact you, contact them.

B. Ask for referrals that public school may find through childfind.

C. Volunteer to participate in a cooperative childfind.

D. If public school screens, work cooperatively.

E. Make public school aware of all handicapped/suspected handicapped.

F. Ask public school for help (some contracting-lots of services-little money).

G. Public school understands Headstart; Headstart knows public school goals.

H. Consult, observe, case conference, alternative placement, testing Individualized Education Program materials, recommendations.

I. Children located through childfind whose placement recommendation is Headstart.

II. Information that should be available to the public schools: Documentation, etc.:

A. Screening

B. Evaluation

C. Individualized Education Programs

D. Case Conference Summary

III. Summary sent to public school regarding ALL former Headstart children:

A. Understanding of goals, etc. of your program vital service to field of education, specifically to special children.

B. Keep up good work, continue to make programs even better.

C. Very real and needed component.

D. Often public schools fail to interpret rules and regulations.